

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 420 714

TM 028 436

AUTHOR Kelemen, Matthew; Koski, William S.
TITLE Political Symbolism, Organizational Entrenchment and the Short History of the California Basic Educational Skills Test.
PUB DATE 1998-04-00
NOTE 42p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Diego, CA, April 13-17, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Change; Educational History; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Licensing Examinations (Professions); *Minimum Competency Testing; Organizational Objectives; *Political Influences; Preservice Teachers; State Legislation; State Programs; Symbolism; *Teacher Certification; Teacher Education; Teacher Qualifications; *Test Use; Testing Programs
IDENTIFIERS California; *California Basic Educational Skills Test

ABSTRACT

California, in response to pessimism about the efficacy of public education, adopted the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST), a three-part test of reading, writing, and mathematics required of teacher applicants. This paper takes a critical look at the genesis, passage, implementation, and consequences of the CBEST legislation. In particular, it analyzes the history of the CBEST to determine the problem or problems it was designed to address, and whether it actually solves such problems. The CBEST was intended to address four problems: (1) the poor performance of California's students; (2) the perception that some teachers were not competent in the basic skills; (3) the relatively low status of the teaching profession; and (4) the alleged poor quality of teacher preparation programs. The era of the CBEST opened officially in December 1982, when 4,952 credential candidates sat for the exam. Since then about three-quarters of candidates pass on the first attempt, but passing rates for minority candidates are lower. While there has been real growth in student achievement in California, there is no evidence that the CBEST has contributed to these gains. The CBEST tests basic skills, but whether these translate into effective teaching is another question that has not been studied. There are suggestions that the CBEST helps enhance teacher professionalism, as its acceptance by the California Teachers Association indicates. Whether the CBEST improves teacher training is also not clear, but it is evident that the test serves to reduce the diversity of the teaching force. In large part, the story of the CBEST is the story of political symbolism. How it became a symbol of the effort for educational improvement, and how that symbol became entrenched in the educational organization in California is outlined. The CBEST has become institutionalized by the state's universities and colleges as an aspect of teacher training and a structure bound to the operation of teacher training institutions. Three appendixes present sample questions, the description of a borderline candidate, and selected CBEST results. (Contains 55 references.) (SLD)

**Political Symbolism, Organizational Entrenchment and the Short History
of the California Basic Educational Skills Test**

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

William Koski

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

**Matthew Kelemen
Stanford University
School of Education, Room 303
Stanford, California 94305-3096
mkelemen@leland.stanford.edu**

**William S. Koski
Stanford University
School of Education
508 CERAS
Stanford, California 94305-3084
bkoski@leland.stanford.edu**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, California, April 13-17, 1998

Teachers occupy a special position of trust in our society. They are entrusted with the education of our children, the importance of which one would be hard-pressed to exaggerate. A child's education is crucial not only to that child's individual prospects; in the aggregate, the education of all children has a profound effect on the future of the state, and indeed the country, in which we live. "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence ends."

-- Judge William H. Orrick (Association of Mexican-American Educators (AMEA) v. California, 1996)

* * *

Scott is ~~dropping~~ dropping in his studies he acts as if he don't care. Scott won't pass in his assignment at all, he a had a poem to learn and he fell to do it.

-- Portion of a note sent home in Mobile, Alabama, by a teacher with a Master's degree (Quoted in *Time Magazine*, June 16, 1990)

In the early 1980s, California was swept up in a national surge of pessimism about the efficacy of public education. Propelled by perceptions that a lack of fundamental math and language skills among some teachers was contributing to an observed decline in student achievement, the state passed legislation requiring basic skills testing for those who wished to become teachers. That legislation required all those applying for a teaching certificate to demonstrate basic reading, writing and mathematics skills in the English language before being permitted to teach in the state's classrooms (Chapter 206, 1982; Chapter 1136, 1981; Selected 1981 California Legislation, 1981). The means by which teacher applicants¹ would be required to demonstrate such proficiency was (and is) passing the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST), a timed, three-part test of reading, writing and mathematics.

Adopted in a climate of poor public perception of teachers and schools, the CBEST was one of many policy "band-aids" applied to the critical wounds of students, particularly poor and minority, who were not receiving an adequate education. This paper takes a critical look at the genesis, passage, implementation, and consequences of the CBEST legislation. In particular, we analyze the history of the CBEST to determine what problem or problems it was designed to address and whether the test actually "solves" those problems. In our view, the CBEST was intended to address four problems: (1) the poor performance of California's students; (2) the perception that certain teachers were not competent in the basic skills; (3) the relatively low status of the teaching profession; and (4) the alleged poor quality of teacher preparation programs.

¹ Teachers are not the only school employees required to pass the CBEST. The CBEST is required for several non-teaching positions, including school librarians, nurses, administrators, and counselors (California Education Code §§ 44270, 44266, 44269, 44267.5).

We conclude by offering an explanation of the birth, history, and continued existence of the CBEST. We argue that the CBEST is the product of political compromise and symbolism, rather than an effort to improve teaching in California. Finally, we explain that the continued existence of the CBEST is due, in part, to the organizational entrenchment of one California agency. Our analysis begins, however, with a review of the historical context that framed the four problems listed above and within which the CBEST came into being.

The Genesis Of the CBEST

By the mid-1970's, one thing seemed clear to California citizens and legislators -- California's and the nation's schools were not equipping students with the necessary skills for a productive life, as evidenced by plummeting student achievement. At least that is what the popular media led people to believe (Comment, 1979; Sandefur, 1987; Shiels, 1975). The public pressure for reform was so strong that Democratic Assemblyman Gary Hart of Santa Barbara, a teacher himself, introduced a bill that would require California's high school students to pass locally developed minimum competency requirements before receiving a diploma. That legislation passed easily and was enacted into law in 1976 (Hart, 1978; Chapter 856, 1976). Hart believed that such legislation not only would allay the fear that California's schools were not preparing their students, it would also serve as a wake-up call to the State and its leaders when it became apparent that certain students were not receiving the quality of education (translation: adequate resources) necessary to achieve a minimum level of competency.²

Applauded by many observers, the student minimum competency legislation had its critics. Particularly, parents of poor and minority children complained that because their local

² The source for this information is an interview on November 7, 1996 with Senator Gary Hart, Director of

schools were inadequate, their children did not stand a chance of passing the competency tests and thus would not be able to graduate from high school (Hart/Bond, 1996). Minority parents from South Central Los Angeles, according to Assemblyman Hart, specifically contended that some *teachers* in their children's schools were illiterate and could not pass the student competency exam -- how could one expect the *students* to pass such an exam? Hart believed that the concern was not unfounded. He witnessed firsthand the basic skills difficulties had by some teachers, as he occasionally received from teacher-constituents letters with grammar and spelling errors. To Assemblyman Hart, this evidence was compelling and the parents' claim was one of basic equity.

To others, it was simply a matter of logic. Recording the public sentiment of the time, J.T. Sandefur (1987, p.11) wrote: "If the public, alarmed by reports of barely literate students graduating from high schools by the thousands, had inspired some sort of mandated minimal competency testing for students, why not do the same for teachers?" Or, as stated in an article by David Seeley (1979, p.248): "Minimum competency tests for teachers are following minimum competency tests for students as night follows day."

The popular media fueled the public alarm regarding the poor quality of teachers. A June 1980 cover story in *Time* magazine chronicled several anecdotes indicting teachers, e.g., the Chicago third grade teacher who wrote on the chalkboard, "Put the following words in alfabetical order;" the functionally illiterate Oregon kindergarten teacher; and the note sent home with severe grammar errors by the Mobile, Alabama teacher holding a master's degree, to name a few. *Time* concluded that:

the Institute for Education Reform at California State University, Sacramento, and Ms. Linda Bond of the California

The tangle of teaching troubles is too complex to be easily unraveled, but one problem whose solution seems fairly straightforward is the matter of illiterate and uninformed teachers. Competency tests can -- and should -- be administered to screen out teachers, old as well as novice, who lack basic skills. Such screening would benefit pupils, but it would also put pressure on marginal colleges to flunk substandard students bound for a career in teaching ("Help! Teacher Can't Teach!," 1980).

An April 1981 article in *Newsweek* provided a similar account of poor teachers, while at the same time sympathizing with teachers in general: "Teachers are in trouble. While it is the children who ultimately suffer from shortcomings in the educational system, it is the teachers who catch the heat. They are the guilty victims, blamed for all that's wrong with the schools. . . . They are criticized for their teaching when many have never been properly taught themselves" (Williams, 1981, p.78).

Even the popular press from the education world was caught up in the rush towards teacher-competency testing. *Phi Delta Kappan* dedicated its entire October 1980 issue to reforming the perceived failings of teacher education programs. An even earlier editorial in *Kappan*, written by Robert Cole, posed the following questions of teacher competence:

Should teachers be required to pass a state examination to prove their knowledge in the subjects they will teach when hired? Can we no longer trust teacher preparatory institutions -- approved by state, regional, and national accrediting agencies -- to weed out weak teachers? Can we not rely on the screening that takes place when a district hires new teachers? (Cole, 1979, p.233)

Public opinion polls overwhelmingly answered that teachers should be required to pass a state test in their respective subjects (Cole, 1979). Moreover, prestigious organizations in the education community came out in support of teacher testing, including the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and the ad hoc committee on Teacher Certification,

Commission on Teacher Credentialing (hereinafter referred to as "Hart/Bond, 1996").

Preparation, and Accreditation of the Council of Chief State School Officers (Sandefur, 1987).

Blaming teachers for the failure of students and requiring those teachers to pass minimum competency tests was a national trend by the late 1970's and early 1980's. From 1964 to 1977, only North Carolina required a teacher certification examination. In the next few years, other states followed suit: by 1984, 37 states mandated teacher testing (Sandefur, 1987, p.12).

The public and media aside, teachers themselves were embroiled in the testing debate. To speak of teacher opinion as cohesive and singular is often misleading, however, and teacher opinion about minimum competency testing is no different. On the one hand, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), led by Albert Shanker, strongly supported teacher competency testing as a means of boosting the professional image of teachers (Hill, 1996; "Help! Teacher Can't Teach!," 1980; Williams, 1981). As Shanker put it:

[W]e have a public which is as well educated or more educated than the teachers. Instead of looking up at teachers, they can look straight at them or down on them. Teachers are surrounded by parents who feel they could do as good a job teaching their children if they weren't too busy making money (Williams, 1981, p.78).

Shanker also stated that "[w]e require physicians, attorneys and others to pass exams before they are licensed. It is time we did the same for teachers" ("Why can't some teachers spell?," 1981). Donning his teacher cap, Senator Hart similarly contended that the minimum competency legislation would enhance the status of teachers and provide more leverage in their quest for higher salaries (Hart/Bond, 1996). On the other hand, the National Education Association (NEA) opposed teacher competency testing, maintaining that such tests are unfair to would-be teachers who have invested heavily in preparing for a teaching career ("Help! Teacher Can't Teach!," 1980).

Others argued that if the public was intent upon blaming teachers for the failure of students, perhaps the real culprits are the colleges and teacher preparation programs that supposedly certified the competency of the teaching force. Those critics further claimed that entrance and exit requirements for such teacher education programs were inadequate. The evidence of such inadequacy was multifaceted. First, 1981 polls found that only 68 percent of American adults thought that teaching was an attractive career option for students (Williams, 1981). Second, verbal and quantitative SAT scores for undergraduates preparing for teaching careers were reportedly declining at a faster rate than the national decline (Travers, 1980). Likewise, in 1980, high school seniors who planned to major in education scored 48 points below the national average in the math component of the SAT and 35 points below the national average in the verbal component, suggesting that future teachers were among the lower achievers (Williams, 1981). Third, some claimed that it was easy to get into teacher education programs. According to one report, California State University at Los Angeles, considered a good school for teacher preparation, rejected only 5 percent of its applicants (Williams, 1981).

Some ascribed a devious motive to the schools of education -- raising money. An editorial in the *Sacramento Bee* argued that teacher competency legislation "will put a little pressure on the most marginal teacher training programs -- many of them are now scratching for students and therefore ready to lower their standards still more to fill their classes -- to either upgrade or shut down" ("For Literate Teachers," 1981). The *Newsweek* article calling for teacher literacy tests provided a distressing tale from a California graduate student who graded the papers of education majors. "They don't know how to organize or present an idea, so you can't figure out whether they don't know the subject or are just plain dumb" (Williams, 1981, p. 81). Yet she gave them

all A's and B's, saying "It's mandatory. The school needs students so badly it will take anybody, and it has to keep everybody." Assemblyman Hart summed up the indictment on teacher education as follows: "I am convinced that the entrance and graduation requirements in our teacher colleges and universities are almost nonexistent. Because of declining enrollment, if students can pay the tuition, the schools will admit them" (Bathen, 1981).

Against this backdrop, Assemblyman Hart proposed the minimum teacher competency bill, AB 757, that would ultimately be implemented in the form of the CBEST. In a press release just after the CBEST bill was introduced, Senator Hart echoed the concerns of the South Central Los Angeles parents and the logic behind the nationwide push to test teachers: "If basic literacy standards are appropriate for high school graduates, they should also apply to all those involved in classroom teaching" (Hart, 1981). Recognizing the limitations of a teacher competency exam, however, Hart stressed that the competency exams should not be used to determine the quality of a teacher. "Literacy is only one measure of a teacher's ability. However, the tests will ensure that those working with our children can read, write and compute. California students deserve no less" (Hart, 1981).

The Problems: Quality and Perceptions

The CBEST legislation, like any policy prescription, was intended to solve a problem. Here we discuss the problems (real or imagined) the CBEST was designed to address.

1. The Falling Achievement of California Students

The CBEST, like many educational policy measures of the early eighties, was seen as a mechanism to curb the decline in student achievement. Hart understood as well as anyone that the problem of student achievement was not soluble by means of a teacher competency test

alone. Indeed, it requires little cynicism to contend that, although better education was at the heart of problem, no one believed that the CBEST was *the* solution to the problem. Rather, it was a piece of the puzzle and it fit well with the earlier student competency legislation. Hart also hoped that the CBEST would attract additional attention to the educational disadvantages suffered by minority and poor students and that educational resources would follow such attention (Hart/Bond, 1996).

2. The Reality and Perception of Teacher Incompetence

The CBEST was also designed to address two related problems -- teacher incompetence and the public perception of teacher incompetence. Obviously, California may have been suffering from one, the other, or both of these problems.

Some "empirical" evidence existed to support the notion that some teachers did not possess basic skills. Starting in 1978, the Lemon Grove School District in Southern California reportedly administered district-devised screening tests to the applicants for certain positions in the district (Subcommittee, 1981). The screening tests, which evaluated the grammar and math skills of applicants for teacher and teacher aide positions, were supposedly set at an eighth grade level for reading and writing, and a seventh grade level for math. The district required the teacher applicants to get 80 percent of the questions right. In 1978, 35 percent of those applicants failed one or more of the tests. The district revised the screening tests downward to the seventh-grade level for reading and writing and the sixth-grade level for math. Still, over 20 percent of the prospective teachers failed one or more of the screening exams.

The Los Angeles Unified School District provided similar evidence. For three years in a row prior to the introduction of the CBEST bill, 13 percent of those holding a teaching credential

and applying for a teaching position with the district failed a test in basic English usage (Subcommittee, 1981).

To some of the supporters of teacher testing, the CBEST was an appropriate mechanism to screen out those poor teachers before they reached the schools. To others who questioned the validity and generalizability of the above-described data, the real issue was one of the perception of teacher incompetence.

The first and most important promise of a basic skills test for teachers is that it will help to restore confidence in parents and the public that standards are being applied in decisions about who will be admitted to the teaching profession (Watkins, 1985).

Viewed in that light, the Staff Analysis of AB 757 prepared for the Senate Subcommittee on Education seemed dead right: “AB 757 is based in large part on perceptions of a nationwide decline in basic skills of certificated personnel comparable to the more widely publicized nationwide decline in student achievement” (Senate Committee, 1981).

3. The Relatively Low Status of the Teaching Profession

Assemblyman Hart, a teacher himself, believed that in the public’s eye the teaching profession was relatively low in status. Hart also believed that a teacher licensing exam would enhance the professionalism and status of teachers, much like a licensing exam supposedly maintains the status of doctors, lawyers, and architects. Hart’s position was borne out by the evidence. Polls showed that teaching was not an attractive profession for young people. Albert Shanker and the AFT supported teacher testing as a means to increase the status (and paychecks) of teachers. But the price for the marginal enhancement of status was too high for the NEA, which opposed such testing.

4. The Poor Quality of Teacher Training Programs

In ascribing blame for the declining achievement of students and the poor quality of teaching, many pointed their fingers at the poor quality of teacher education schools. The caliber of students that teacher preparation programs attracted, the entrance requirements for such programs, and the qualifications for graduation from such programs all were considered low. The CBEST was seen as an incentive to those schools and the message was clear: either prepare future teachers with the basic skills, or students will not select your school.

The Legislative History And Implementation Of the CBEST

Legislation

Introduced by Assemblyman Hart on March 3, 1981, the CBEST bill, AB 757, enjoyed broad support. Foremost, the bill was supported on both sides of the aisle. Because the legislation was so-called “standards” legislation, the Republicans could get behind it and because fellow Democrats viewed Hart as a progressive Democrat, the standards legislation was legitimized and not deemed “suspect” (Hart/Bond, 1996).

Certain individual congressional members did not support the legislation, however. Assembly Speaker Willie Brown (D) and Assemblywoman Theresa Hughes (D) opposed the legislation because, in part, they believed that such standardized testing would have a disproportionately negative impact on minority teacher applicants (Hart/Bond, 1996; Enrolled Bill Memorandum; 1981). Initially, Senator John Garamendi (D) also opposed the bill based upon his general mistrust of licensing legislation (Rudy & Stein, 1981): “Licensing bills are always for the protection of those licensed. I think I see another one of them here.”

Outside of the state capitol building, the proposed legislation was apparently well-

received. Editorials from the *Sacramento Bee*, the *Sacramento Union*, the *Valley Register*, and KPIX Television in San Francisco, all lauded Hart's bill. Certain education organizations supported the bill including the California School Boards Association, the California State Universities and Colleges, Fremont Unified School District, and the California School Employees Association (Subcommittee, 1981). Citizen groups such as the California Taxpayers' Association also supported the legislation. So widespread was public support that the Fact Sheet on AB 757 distributed to the Assembly Committee on Education and the Senate Committees on Finance and Education reported that opposition to the bill was "None" (Subcommittee, 1981).³ Teachers gave the bill a mixed review. Keeping with its national party line, the California Federation of Teachers (CFT), a branch of the American Federation of Teachers, supported the bill. The larger California Teachers Association (CTA), on the other hand, waffled on the issue. Newspaper clippings from shortly after the introduction of the bill showed that the CTA opposed the test. In an interview one month after Assemblyman Hart introduced the bill, CTA president Ed Foglia argued that a teacher competency test would fail to address the problems in education ("Literacy," 1981; "CTA president," 1981). Foglia lashed out against the proposed legislation saying that "I have sort of a problem with the connotation that teachers are not literate." He also attacked standardized tests on the grounds that they may be used and misused by administrators and may be biased against minority teacher applicants.

Despite that early harsh rhetoric, the CTA's position toward the test softened (Bathen, 1981). Hart speculated that the CTA found itself in a difficult position -- it's primary objective

³ There is evidence, however, that the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) opposed the bill (at least after its implementation). In letters to then-Senator Gary Hart dated March 30, 1983 and October 9, 1985, MALDEF criticized the enacted CBEST legislation as having a disproportionate impact on minority teacher applicants and being improperly used as an entrance exam for teacher training programs.

was to protect all of its rank-and-file members, but that objective seemed to clash with maintaining the status of the profession as a whole. It's "embarrassing" for a teachers' organization to come out against teacher literacy testing, quipped Hart (Hart/Bond, 1996). The CTA apparently decided to pressure the legislature to at least remove what it believed were the most threatening portions of the proposed legislation -- the requirements that (1) already employed teachers holding "special" credentials must take the exam to renew their credentials and (2) teachers who sought employment in different districts must pass the exam (Bathen, 1981; Hart/Bond, 1996).⁴ Despite its distaste for certain provisions, the CTA was listed as a supporter of the bill when it was sent to the Senate Finance Committee on August 28, 1981. Still, the CTA's muscle-flexing on those provisions apparently proved successful in the end, as the offending language was removed from the legislation prior to its effective date of January 1, 1983 (Madamba, 1982; Chapter 206, 1982; Cage, 1981).⁵

Teacher colleges and universities, another group under attack, apparently voiced no formal opposition to the legislation. In fact, the California State Universities and Colleges, institutions that traditionally train a large portion of California's teaching force, supported the bill. Noteworthy, however, was the opposition of the University of California and private teacher training programs to an original provision in the bill that would make proficiency in basic skills an entrance requirement for teacher training institutions. That language was eliminated from the bill (Senate Committee, 1981, p.2). Desirous of holding teachers' colleges accountable, however, Hart inserted a provision in the bill that would require the CTC to compile and publish

⁴ When Hart first designed the CBEST legislation, he wanted to test all teachers including those with tenure. Hart and his legislative assistant, Linda Bond, however, received a legal opinion that such a requirement for tenured teachers would likely be illegal (Hart/Bond 1996).

⁵ CTA's ambivalence about the legislation continued a decade later, however. As is discussed below, CTA

statistics on the CBEST passing rate for each teacher training program in the state (Hart/Bond, 1996).

With widespread support, the bill passed both the Assembly (66 to 7) and Senate (30 to 1). AB 757 was then sent to Governor Jerry Brown, who signed the bill on October 1, 1981. The CBEST legislation was amended in 1982, but maintained its essential aspects.

Implementation

The legislation set out clear instructions to the state bureaucracy as to the implementation of the CBEST. It authorized the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to find or design a suitable test and set minimum passing standards in the three subject areas of reading, writing and math. The statute also required the Superintendent to choose an Advisory Board to assist in the process.

Administration of the test was left to the Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing (CTPL), the agency responsible for credentialing California teachers.⁶ According to Hart, the job of crafting the test and its standards was left to the Superintendent because he and others believed that CTPL was not committed to the spirit of the law (Hart/Bond, 1996; Cage, 1981).

The Superintendent formed a 31-member Advisory board composed of 17 classroom teachers, as well as parents, administrators, college faculty, a college student, and a member of a local school board. The Board, after hearing Hart's rationale for passing the CBEST legislation, proceeded to determine the content of reading, writing and math that it expected to be on a minimum competency test. The group achieved no consensus on the math content, but

advocated in 1993 that the CBEST was an illegal employment test.

tentatively agreed to focus on problem-solving skills and numeration, place value, and computation (OPER, 1983). With this information in hand and a recommendation that designing a test in-house would be too time-consuming, a review panel from the California State Department of Education (CDE) and the CTPL sought out a suitable contractor.

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) of Princeton, New Jersey, won the contract, proposing to modify its own Pre-Professional Skills Test for California's purposes. ETS representatives and members of the Advisory Board then formed "test development committees" in the three subject areas and wrote questions for the test (OPER, 1983). ETS conducted studies on the questions to eliminate any cultural biases and, following that, field-tested the CBEST in October 1982 using with 1,991 volunteers (Wheeler & Elias, 1983).

As crafted, the test was (and is) composed of 40 multiple-choice questions in reading, 40 multiple-choice questions in mathematics, and two essays to measure writing ability. In total, it measures the following skills:

- Reading: Literal, logical, and critical comprehension
- Mathematics: Processes used in problem solving, problem solving applications, and mathematics concepts and principles
- Writing: Organization of ideas, consistency of reasoning, presentation of facts to support arguments, mechanics and syntax (Watkins, 1985)

(See Appendix 1 for sample CBEST questions). The Advisory Board identified these skills as those one would "ordinarily expect of a college graduate" (Watkins, 1985).

Following the field test, ETS and the Advisory Board convened nearly 300 "judges" -- teachers, administrators, and university faculty from across the state -- to determine the validity of the CBEST. In particular, they aimed to give the Superintendent guidance in setting passing

⁶ In 1983, the agency's name was changed to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, or CTC

scores and to evaluate the test's content in terms of its relevance to the task of teaching (OPER, 1983).

The evaluative process, known as the Angoff method, went as follows: the judges received a briefing on the purpose and content of the CBEST legislation and then were presented with the profile of a "borderline" California teaching candidate, known as "Dale" (See Appendix 2 for a description of Dale) (Wheeler & Elias, 1983). Moving through the test questions one by one, judges were asked to estimate what percentage of 100 borderline candidates (i.e., 100 people like Dale) would answer the question correctly. From these estimates, suggested passing levels were computed to be 57 percent correct for reading and 48 percent for math. The Advisory Board members made their own estimates using the same process and arrived at higher proposed passing rates: 65 percent for reading and 63 percent for math. After seeing the actual passing rates from the field test and the lower suggestions from the judges, the Board dropped its recommended passing rate in math to 58 percent but maintained the higher rate for reading, as well as a recommended pass rate in writing of 67 percent (OPER, 1983).

In September of 1982, the CTPL took over the responsibility for the CBEST with the understanding that decisions on passing rates remained in the hands of the Superintendent. In December, the CTC (the new name for the CTPL) forwarded the results of the validity studies to the newly-elected Superintendent Bill Honig and outlined his policy options. While the CTC argued that passing scores be set low and adjusted upward with each test administration, Honig decided to set the scores *higher* than the Advisory Board's recommendation. "I realize that this means that some candidates won't receive a California teaching credential, but our children have

(OPER, 1983).

to come first” (OPER, 1983).

The Consequences of The CBEST

The era of the CBEST officially opened in December of 1982, when 4,952 credential candidates sat for the exam.⁷ Since then, between 37,000 and 47,000 potential teachers have taken the exam each year, and about three-quarters of them have passed on the first attempt (See Appendix 3) (Brinlee, 1993). To pass the test, the examinee must pass each section. Those who fail one section can retake that section as many times as they desire and they need not retake the sections already passed. Pass rates for those re-taking the test are lower than for first-time takers (Guthrie et al., 1991).

Individuals identify a variety of specific reasons for taking the test, including getting a credential, being eligible for substitute teaching, and seeking admission to a professional preparation program. The number of people taking the test for the first time as a prerequisite for a teacher preparation program has risen unevenly, from 12,350 in the 1984-85 academic year to a high of 16,394 in 1990-91 (Brinlee, 1993). These continued increases have occurred despite an amendment to the language of the law expressing the legislature’s intent that the CBEST not be used as an entrance exam for teacher preparation programs (California Education Code §44252(f)).

The most striking result year after year is the performance of ethnic minorities on the test. While the passing rate for whites taking the test for the first time has consistently hovered above 80 percent, the rate for blacks has never risen above 41 percent and just over half of Mexican-Americans pass on their first attempt (See Appendix 3) (Brinlee, 1993). In addition,

⁷ It should be noted that not all California teachers have passed the CBEST. Thousands of teachers who

examinees seeking a credential for bilingual teaching consistently pass at much lower rates than other candidates (Brinlee, 1993).

In response to the disproportionate impact of the CBEST, a group of Mexican-American educators, a group of Black educators, and a group of Asian-Pacific bilingual educators sued the State of California under Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, claiming that the state discriminates against them by requiring that they pass the CBEST before being permitted to teach in California. Although the case has, to date, more than a twelve-year history, beginning in the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 1983, the matter was tried in 1996 before Judge William Orrick of the Federal District Court in San Francisco.

From the outset, the state admitted that the CBEST disproportionately impacts minority teacher applicants. Given that admission and Orrick's finding that the state did not engage in intentional discrimination, the legal question under Title VI was whether the test has "a manifest relationship to the employment in question." That is, whether the test is "job-related" in that "it actually measures skills, knowledge, or ability required for successful performance of the job" and that it constitutes a "business necessity because an alternative selection device [does not] exist[] which would have comparable business utility and less adverse impact" (AMEA v. California, 1996, pp.28-29). Evidence in the case was voluminous and technical. Expert witnesses clashed on every conceivable issue from the validity of the test to whether the cutoff score was properly set to whether there were adequate substitutes to the test. Taking into account the mountain of evidence and recognizing that there are better ways of determining what is a good teacher, Judge Orrick ruled that the test requirement did not violate federal law.

held California credentials at the time the legislation was enacted were "grandfathered in" and not required to pass.

The California Teachers Association again demonstrated its ambivalence toward the test when it filed a friend-of-the-court brief in support of the plaintiffs' 1993 summary adjudication motion against the State (Amicus Curiae Brief, 1993). Curiously, instead of attacking the test on its legal merits, the CTA this time voiced a new policy concern: that the CBEST is a major impediment to achieving the objective of diversity in the state teaching profession. Thus, the CTA did not attack the requirement of basic skills, *per se*, it merely argued that the test hindered another important policy objective.

In 1995, the CTC eliminated some "higher-order" mathematics skills from the CBEST, the one and only alteration in the test's fourteen-year history. According to David Wright⁸ of the CTC, these excisions, which included algebra and geometry skills, stemmed from a new validity study, in which participants took a more narrow view than earlier studies of what math skills they considered essential. Some have argued that the CTC changed the math portion under pressure from the legal requirements that the test be job-related (Hill, 1996).

Analysis: Missions accomplished? New Problems Created?

At the outset, we suggested four problems that the passage of the CBEST was meant to address: (1) the falling achievement of students in California; (2) perceived and real teacher incompetence; (3) the low status of the teaching profession; and (4) the poor quality of teacher training programs. With the legislative, policy and legal history of the CBEST in mind, we now suggest the degree to which the test has had an impact on these problems.

1. Student Achievement

Moreover, private school teachers need not take the test nor be credentialed.

⁸ Telephone interview with David Wright of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, November 15, 1996.

The decade since the passage of the CBEST has seen real growth in student achievement in California. Reading, writing, and mathematics scores on the California Assessment Program steadily and modestly increased in all grade levels tested from 1983 to 1990, averaging 4.4 percent annual growth (Guthrie et al., 1991). From 1983 to 1988, average SAT math scores grew 32 percent and verbal scores grew 28 percent, both apace of the national averages. The numbers suggest a consistent pattern of growth.

That said, there is absolutely no evidence that these increases are in any way linked to the passage and implementation of the CBEST. Even if one accepts the notion that educational inputs collectively have a marked impact on student achievement -- a problematic notion at best (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1981) -- there remain two concerns: (1) it is extremely difficult to identify causality in the midst of so many school inputs such as funding, instructional reforms, and student assessment; and more importantly, (2) the CTC has not undertaken any evaluation of the CBEST, either to determine its impact on teacher quality (Haertel, 1995) or to make the extended reach to student achievement.

2. Teacher Incompetence

Determining whether the CBEST has addressed what has been generically called “teacher incompetence” is complicated. To the extent that one expected the CBEST to somehow determine who are “good” teachers, the test is a failure. Simply put, the test does not measure good teaching (Wheeler & Elias, 1983). It is important to note, however, that the test was *never meant* to be a screen for quality teaching (Hart/Bond, 1996), but rather made a more modest claim:

The CBEST is not a cure-all for the ills of California’s public schools, but it is not meant to be. It is simply a threshold measure. The State is entitled to ensure that teachers and

others who work in the public schools possess a minimal level of competency in basic reading, writing, and math skills before they are entrusted with the education of our children (AMEA v. California, 1996, p.12).

The question, then, is whether the CBEST really is a proper threshold.

If the CBEST is intended to measure whether teacher applicants are competent teachers, the lack of any systematic evaluation of whether certain teachers were or are incompetent casts doubt on the claim that such a test will address the problem of incompetence in teaching. No such evaluation was conducted to establish the benchmark before the CBEST law was passed and no such evaluation has been undertaken since. As G. Pritchey Smith (1987, p.225) observed, “competency testing of teachers has taken root despite inadequate research to show a direct relationship between performance on pencil-paper tests and on-the-job competence.”

Granted, experts have conducted validity tests that supposedly support the contention that the CBEST tests job-related teaching skills. Indeed, much of the CBEST trial focused on this very question. For instance, although there was evidence that no consensus was ever reached regarding the mathematical skills that are considered essential to the job of teaching (Marcoulides & Bruno, 1986; OPER, 1983), Judge Orrick found persuasive the State’s evidence showing that all skills, including the math skills, tested by the CBEST, are required for successful performance of the job of teaching (AMEA v. California, 1996). Nonetheless, because there is no evidence that systematic teacher incompetence existed in the first instance and because there is no evidence that the CBEST measures *competent teaching*, one cannot say that the CBEST has addressed (or failed to address) the problem of incompetent teaching in the classroom.

What, then, does the CBEST measure? Some may argue that any standardized, pencil-paper test measures only how one performs on such a test. That position seems too extreme,

however. Because the CBEST has been extensively screened to eliminate bias and has been subjected to repeated validity tests, one may safely contend that the CBEST tests whether teacher applicants possess certain basic skills. But possession of basic skills does not translate into competent classroom teaching. This observation underscores the second half of the teacher competency problem -- the perception of teacher incompetence.

While the evidence surrounding “real” teacher competence is questionable, there seems to be stronger evidence that the CBEST did improve the perception of the California teaching force. Senator Hart stopped receiving complaints from constituents about incompetent teachers (Hart/Bond, 1996). Likewise, media attention to the problem of poor quality teachers ebbed dramatically after the passage of the CBEST . . . in the short run, anyway.

One of the great ironies of the CBEST’s history, though, is the resurgence of public rage about teacher incompetence as a direct result of the publicity surrounding the lawsuit trying to eliminate the CBEST. At the height of the trial, newspapers throughout California published countless editorials and letters to the editor excoriating teachers who could not pass the test. Even more damning, several newspapers published sample CBEST tests and encouraged readers to try their hand. Readers who responded expressed shock and outrage at the simplicity of the test and professed to getting perfect scores while sipping their morning coffee. While some letters criticized the test, these responses were more typical: “If someone cannot pass the CBEST . . . I question their ability to function as an effective educator”; “It took me less than 10 minutes to score 100 percent. . . . The thought that one of my children could be taught by a teacher with such a level of incompetency frightens me” (“Our Readers Grade the CBEST Test,” 1996). David Wright of the CTC related to *Teacher Magazine* that his 11-year old triplets found

the test easy and scored perfectly as well (Hill, 1996). As these anecdotes indicate, bringing the CBEST out of the shadows had the effect of rekindling the outrage that played such a big part in the legislation's initiation.

3. Enhancing Teacher Professionalism

There is no doubt that teaching remains a low status profession in California and the recent outpouring of doubt about teacher quality further harms teachers' reputational capital. Incrementally, however, the passage and implementation of the CBEST enhanced the profession of teaching in California. The eventual support of the California Teachers Association shows that, despite the potential harm of the test to some would-be teachers and CTA members, the Association deemed the CBEST important to the improvement of the profession's image.

The California Federation of Teachers, the other major union in the state, supported the legislation from the outset as a means to achieve better status for teachers. In addition, the test continued to receive validation as an important component of teacher professionalism by Albert Shanker, the influential former president of the American Federation of Teachers.

4. Improving Teacher Training Programs

By requiring the CTC to publish annually CBEST results for each teacher training program, the test introduces a measure of performance accountability. Some universities, such as California State University Dominguez Hills, have expressed concern about their poor results and have publicly announced steps toward improvement (CSU Dominguez Hills, 1983). Thus, at the level of policy talk, there is a modicum of improvement for these programs.

In terms of practice, the only obvious change has been the widespread use of the CBEST as an entrance requirement. This practice continues despite the fact that the legislature amended

the law to demonstrate its intent that the CBEST not be used as an entrance exam.

The Unintended Consequences

Any analysis of the CBEST would be incomplete without examining its unintended effects. Without a doubt, the most significant such effect is the de-diversification of the California teaching force. The disproportionate numbers of minorities who fail the test, and are therefore barred from the profession, necessarily results in less diversity. In 1992, six percent of California public school teachers were black, the same percentage as three years earlier (Kirst et al., 1995).

Exacerbating this problem is the possibility (suggested but not proven) that minorities are deterred from re-taking the test at greater rates than other candidates (AMEA v. California, 1996). To the extent diversity in the teaching force is a goal, it has been negatively impacted; and to the extent that minority children benefit from minority teachers, such a benefit is lessened.

The CBEST has also had a chilling effect on the entrance into teaching of individuals whose first language is not English. The net result is a shortage of teachers in bilingual education in several parts of the state (particularly irksome given the continued growth of immigrant populations in California). It should be noted, though, that time limits on the math and reading sections were extended in 1984, then again in 1995, to aid these individuals (AMEA v. California, 1996; Mastain, 1987).

The final unintended consequence of the CBEST is the spotlight the test has cast on California's failure to prepare those minority students who wish to become teachers. That is an indictment of the system that allowed those would-be teachers to graduate from high school (and college) and it is further evidence of the California's failure to educate adequately its urban

minority populations. The CBEST and the litigation it spawned has reminded the media and the public about how California's schools are shortchanging their minority students.

Explaining the CBEST: Politics, Symbolism and Organizational Entrenchment

Ask why California mandates a "basic skills" test and one might get a different answer from a teacher, from Gary Hart, from the parents of South Central Los Angeles, or from the California Federation of Teachers. From our perspective, it seems that the CBEST did a better job of addressing problems centered in the realm of "policy talk," while those focused on genuine change were not "solved" in any sense. We offer two explanations: political symbolism and organizational entrenchment. The former is supported by the most convincing evidence with respect to the passage and implementation of the CBEST, while the latter gives us an understanding of why the CBEST is still around today.⁹

The Power and Politics of Symbols

In large part, the story of the CBEST is a story of political symbolism. Symbols are an integral part of political life and political behavior. Symbols, rituals, and ceremonies are, on the one hand, necessary to create a shared meaning and coherence in political life (March, 1981;

⁹ We recognize that one might alternatively explain the CBEST as an effort by organized teacher interests to enhance the professional status of teachers. The corollary is that a licensing examination acts as a barrier to entry into the profession. According to conflict theorists in sociology such as Randall Collins, such barriers to entry create a higher social standing, greater job protection, and, hopefully, higher remuneration for those who clear the hurdles. Such an argument has been advanced by those who believe that the licensing requirements for doctors and lawyers are self-imposed means of monopolizing the profession, enhancing social status, and preventing the "watering down" of the occupation (Collins, 1979). Indeed, Senator Garamendi expressed exactly that concern when he initially opposed the CBEST bill. Viewed in that light, CFT's support for the CBEST was nothing but a ploy to raise teachers' social standing.

Of course the flaw in this analysis is the CTA's failure to support wholeheartedly the CBEST legislation. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that such an organization, which stood to lose dues-paying members (especially if teacher testing expands to other forms of accountability), gave its tacit, if not explicit approval to teacher testing by not opposing the legislation. A second flaw in this analysis is that the move to teacher testing was not initiated and controlled by teachers' organizations in the way that state bar associations, for instance, initiated and control state bar examinations for future lawyers. The initiative for the teacher competency testing movement "came from state legislatures and boards of education rather than from teacher organizations or college and university schools and departments of education, thereby weakening the position of educators to govern their profession" (Smith, 1987, p.225). In California, the legislature led the charge to teacher testing. Thus, it seems unlikely that testing was a

Meyer and Rowan, 1977), and to “reaffirm belief in the fundamental rationality and democratic character of the system” (Edelman, 1967). On the other hand, symbols and symbolic behavior are used as strategy in political competition. Politicians condense complex ideas and positions into digestible emotive symbols to attract public support (Edelman, 1967). Politicians and policy-makers routinely make public policy and then ignore its implementation and consequences (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973; Tyack and Cuban, 1995). But these strategic uses of symbolic politics, though seemingly perverse or dysfunctional, are also necessary to creating legitimacy in our political institutions and the shared belief in the rationality, responsiveness, and effectiveness of those institutions. Viewed as political symbol, the passage and implementation of the CBEST served to legitimize other educational policy decisions and reinforce the belief that the legislature was acting on a perceived public problem.

The climate in which the CBEST was passed was a cold one for teachers. Tales of teacher incompetence abounded in the popular press. Many California parents, whose children had to pass a basic skills test to graduate from high school, believed that teachers should have to pass a basic skills test themselves. In short, there was a loss of faith in teachers and a demand upon the State and schools to *do something*. That loss of faith, however, may not have been based in fact.

AB 757 was supported in the legislature with shaky foundational evidence for its need. The only indications of teacher incompetence in the legislative analyses were (1) the anecdotal stories from *Newsweek* and *Time*, (2) SAT and ACT statistics from students who planned to become teachers, (3) a one-line blurb about the results of teacher-applicant testing in Los

means by which the state’s teachers sought to control and enhance the status of their own profession.

Angeles, and (4) limited data from the Lemon Grove School District's teacher testing. The only "empirical" evidence in this list -- the Los Angeles Unified and Lemon Grove data -- was flawed in several ways: no validity tests were performed on the tests, no descriptions of test content were provided, and the sample sizes were too small to generalize the findings. Thus, the state legislature possessed very little hard evidence of actual teacher incompetence when it adopted the CBEST bill.

To the extent that some legislators believed the bill would "improve" teaching in California, the evidence of the need for improvement was virtually non-existent. More important, the notion that a basic skills test could improve teaching or identify good teachers was faulty reasoning. Possession of basic skills cannot be equated with good teaching and the CBEST's legislative sponsor never intended to equate the two. Not surprisingly, there is no evidence today that the CBEST has improved teaching in California.

Given the flimsy evidence and given the imperative to "do something," the legislature enacted a minimally substantive and highly symbolic instrument to placate the public and inch toward greater teacher accountability. To the point: It worked. The great success of the CBEST has been the restoration of public confidence that the state can screen out incompetent would-be teachers and that new teachers are not illiterate.

Of course, just how that symbol took form is another matter and one best explained by the process of political bargaining. This is certainly not an earthshattering revelation, given the political context that shaped the formation and implementation of the test. The CBEST can be understood as the product of negotiations among several political groups and actors with vested interests in the shape of state education policy. As the relative power of these groups and actors

waxed and waned, the shape and direction of the CBEST changed accordingly.

Gary Hart made the opening bid. Hart was an ambitious legislator with a general agenda to promote quality education and aid schools in high poverty situations. There are a million and one initiatives he could have championed. Rather than being overly attached to any one piece of legislation, he correctly read the political situation. He knew that: (a) the time was right for a mechanism to improve teacher quality; (b) a teacher competency test was the most politically and economically feasible mechanism; and (c) he was the right person to lead the charge. As a progressive Democrat who supported the move toward tougher standards for schools and teachers, he had strong credibility on both sides of the aisle. In addition, he chaired the subcommittee that oversaw education reform matters, which allowed him to shepherd the CBEST through the legislature.

In the legislature, several actors attempted, with varying success, to mold the CBEST. For example, the California Teachers Association skillfully negotiated its agenda into the CBEST legislation, which it opposed as introduced. Over the course of the bill's legislative history, CTA managed to eliminate the provisions that it found offensive, leaving a law that very nicely protected its interest and enhanced the image of teachers. Teresa Hughes, a Democratic legislator who also opposed the CBEST legislation, was not so successful. Outgunned and outnumbered, she did not manage to mount any substantial opposition to the bill. Therefore, she bided her time until Hart left the Assembly, then launched an offensive against the CBEST. She ultimately failed to derail the test, but has negotiated a way to circumscribe the test's influence on practice, by amending the legislative intent to admonish teacher preparation programs against using the test as an entrance exam.

Even though there was speculation that minority teachers would be adversely affected by the passage of the CBEST legislation (“CTA President,” 1981), would-be minority teachers lacked a ripe claim and the political power that would have allowed them to negotiate a more favorable arrangement. Once the results of the CBEST bore out their claim, they turned to the courts, where legislative clout was unnecessary. Regardless of the outcome of the case, the litigation pressured the CTC into reviewing the validity of the test. Consequently, the math portion of the CBEST, which is the most significant barrier to passing the test, was modified and made easier.

After Governor Brown signed the bill, Hart continued to advise those in charge of crafting the test, but, by and large, the CBEST had entered the bureaucracy. The Advisory Board, staff from the California Department of Education, and the ETS, put the instrument together and recommended passing scores to the Superintendent of Instruction, Bill Honig. In deciding the passing scores, Honig faced not only the recommendations of the “experts,” but also a real constituency that had just elected him on “campaign promises to raise the quality of teachers entering the California public schools” (Watkins, 1985), among other things. This is the constituency to whom Honig listened when he set passing scores well above any of the expert recommendations. So, it is not surprising that Honig followed “the time honored wisdom that seventy percent is passing on any test” (Watkins, 1985). In fact, it confirmed the understanding among educators and psychometricians that there is absolutely no objective way to set a passing score on a test (Wheeler & Elias, 1983). All such decisions are arbitrary, judgmental, and in this case, symbolic.¹⁰

¹⁰ We thank Senator Gary Hart for his thoughtful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. As a “rejoinder”

The Strength of Organizational Entrenchment

A multiple choice teacher competency test is not the only option available to policy-makers in California desirous of enhancing teacher quality and professionalism. In fact, teacher credentialing legislation in 1988 launched a new initiative, the California New Teacher Project (CNTP), which attempts to strengthen the teaching pool by means of better assessment of and support to new teachers. After four years, both the CTC and the CDE recognize that “The California New Teacher Project has demonstrated that intensive support, continued training and informative assessments of teachers in their first professional years result in better instruction for students” (Haertel, 1995, p.31). Why, then, as the legislature and state agencies demonstrate their commitment to new ideas in teacher credentialing, does the minimally informative CBEST persist?

The question is central to institutional thinking about organizational behavior. As Powell (1991, p.190) asks: “How are the practices and structures perpetuated over time, particularly in circumstances where utilitarian calculations would suggest they are dysfunctional [sic]? Why are practices reproduced when superior options are available?”

Organizational theorists have long understood that organizations often act to protect their own survival even at the expense of technical efficiency or moral purpose. “[O]nce established, organizations change their unifying purposes. They tend to perpetuate themselves; and in the effort to survive may change the reasons for existence” (Barnard 1938, p. 89, quoted in Scott

to our argument that the CBEST is largely symbolic, Senator Hart pointed out that the CBEST has kept out of the teaching profession in California many poorly trained individuals and this is not merely symbolic. While we agree with Senator Hart’s observation that the CBEST can and does screen out persons who could not even pass the CBEST, we argue that screening out such presumptively unqualified persons is precisely the symbolic effect intended. There is no guarantee that the test can improve teaching or learning in California, but the message has been sent that the state is “doing something” to ensure its children are not being taught by illiterates. This is quite a modest goal for an expensive policy. Yet the symbolic value is great.

1992).¹¹ In early institutional approaches to organizations, Selznick (1948, 1949) identified self-maintenance as the primary motivation of organizational action. To varying degrees, organizations and their components become institutionalized or “*infuse[d] with value* beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand” (Selznick 1957, p. 11, emphasis in original).

Since these early formulations, institutional theorists have developed a more sophisticated understanding of the processes influencing the persistence, or entrenchment, of organizational components. Powell (1991) argues that in various settings, four different forces promote the survival of practices and structures: (1) actors, especially powerful ones, who benefit from practices and structures make *active* efforts to preserve them; (2) practices and structures are so tied up in “complex interdependencies” with existing arrangements that the costs of change are high; (3) practices and structures come to be taken for granted and are thus not subject to routine questioning; and (4) and, finally, they persevere because prior decisions limit future arrangements (what Powell calls “path-dependent processes”).

In the case of the CBEST, as in many complex organizational cases, it is likely that all of these forces operate to some degree. For example, despite a belated amendment to the law declaring the legislature’s intent that the CBEST not be used as an entrance exam for teacher preparation programs, numerous such programs use it for just that purpose. To California’s universities and colleges, the CBEST has become too valuable and too convenient to abandon. It has become institutionalized, both in the sense of being a taken-for-granted aspect of teacher training in California and as a structure tightly bound to the operation of teacher training institutions.

¹¹ For a discussion of the historical development of theories of organizations as “natural” systems, see

But what is most striking is the evidence of *active organizational entrenchment* on the part of the state, in particular the Commission on Teacher Credentialing. When threatened with a major legal challenge to the CBEST, the State mustered a \$2 million defense of the program. Further, despite having no evaluation mechanism and no regular schedule for re-examining the test's validity, the CTC in 1995 conducted a validity study for the first time in ten years. As a result, the CTC eliminated the more disputed math components, thereby making the CBEST legally bulletproof, and thus securing the existing organizational arrangement.

In considering the CTC's actions, it is important to remember that Hart mistrusted the Commission and made sure that important decisions about the CBEST's inception were left to the Superintendent of Instruction. With such an historical referent, the CTC has a clear organizational interest in maintaining any and all authority it now wields. At a more practical level, the oversight and administration of the CBEST represents a significant portion of the CTC's operation; it makes good sense that the CTC would protect such a core structure and function.

Public agencies in California and elsewhere have a long history of perpetuating themselves (Selznick 1957, Kaufman 1976). If one were to view the California Department of Education, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, and the legislature as part of one monolithic governmental entity, the entire history of the CBEST might be viewed as a bureaucratic effort to enhance and solidify the State's control over teachers and teaching. This, we think, is extreme and the evidence points more conclusively to a political and symbolic explanation of the passage and early implementation of the CBEST.

Once the baton was passed to the CTC, however, organizational entrenchment set in. One can easily imagine how mechanisms for improving teacher quality in California might be added on to the requirement that all new teachers pass the CBEST. It is a more dim prospect that any of those initiatives will replace the CBEST in the near future.¹²

Englewood Cliffs, N.J.

¹² In his helpful comments on an earlier draft, Senator Hart pointed out that the CTC has taken the lead on initiatives to improve teacher preparation and training, specifically the California New Teachers Project which we mention in the text. Rather than entrenchment, Hart contends, the CTC's actions reflect a view (to which he ascribes) that *both* the CBEST and the new initiatives are critical ingredients in the state's approach to teacher screening and training. However, given the minimal *substantive* role that the CBEST appears to play, it is unlikely an organization with the CTC's expertise related to teacher preparation would propose adding new initiatives on to the its existing structure *as a way to improve the system*. Such incremental additions are better explained by the CTC's desire to ensure its own survival. We do not contend that that the CTC does not want to improve the way in which California teachers are screened and prepared. Rather, we contend that survival instincts override such goals, as they do in so many organizations.

References

- Application for Submission of Amicus Curiae Brief of California Teachers Association and Amicus Curiae Brief in Support of Plaintiffs' Motion for Partial Summary Judgment on the Applicability of Title VII and the Uniform Guidelines, No. C-92-3874 WHO (1993).
- Association of Mexican-American Educators, et al. v. California, et al., No. C-92-3874 WHO (1996).
- Bathen, S. (1981, April 8). Assembly Panel Endorses Teacher Proficiency Tests. *The Sacramento Bee*, p. B1.
- Brinlee, P. (1993). *The California Basic Educational Skills Test: Annual Report of Examination Results 1991-92*. Sacramento: Commission on Teacher Credentialing.
- Cage, M. C. (1981, August 9). Teacher Proficiency Plan Passes Test in Committee. *The Sacramento Bee*.
- California State University Dominguez Hills (1983). Dr. Donald R. Gerth, CSUDH President, Reacts to CBEST Ratings. Carson, CA.
- Chapter 206. (1982). California Statutes of 1982. Sacramento: California State Assembly.
- Chapter 1136. (1981). California Statutes of 1981. Sacramento: California State Assembly.
- Chapter 856. (1976). California Statutes of 1976. Sacramento: California State Assembly.
- Cole, R. W. (1979). Minimum Competency Tests for Teachers: Confusion Compounded. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 64(4), 233.
- Coleman, J. S., Hoffer, T., & Kilgore, S. (1981). *Public and Private Schools*. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Collins, R. (1979). *The Credential Society*. New York: Academic Press.
- Comment. (1979). Implications of Minimum Competency Legislation: A Legal Duty of Care? *Pacific Law Journal*, 10, 947.
- CTA president raps proposed teacher tests. (1981, March 23). *Stockton Record*.
- Edelman, M. (1967). *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Edelman, M. (1971). *Politics as Symbolic Action*. Chicago: Markham

Enrolled Bill-Memorandum to Governor, Bill No. 757. (1981). Sacramento.

For Literate Teachers. (1981, August 11). *The Sacramento Bee*.

Guthrie, J. W., Kirst, M. W., Odden, A. R., Koppich, J. E., Hayward, G. R., Adams, J. E., Jr., Geeting, G., & Webb, F. R. (1991). *Conditions of Education in California 1990*. Berkeley: Policy Analysis for California Education.

Haertel, E. H. (1995). *The Need for the CBEST in Assuring the Quality of Public School Teachers for the State of California*. San Francisco: Expert Report.

Hart, G. (1981). Letter to the Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr. Sacramento.

Hart, G. (1978). The California Pupil Proficiency Law As Viewed by Its Author. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 59(9), 592-595.

Help! Teacher Can't Teach! (1980, June 16). *Time*, 54-62.

Hill, D. (1996, May/June). Taking on the Test. *Teacher Magazine*, 37-43.

Kaufman, H. (1976). *Are Government Organizations Immortal?* Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.

Kirst, M., Hayward, G., Koppich, J., Finkelstein, N., Birky, L. P., & Guthrie, J. (1995). *Conditions of Education in California 1994-95*. Berkeley: Policy Analysis for California Education.

Literacy test plan nettles teachers. (1981, March 24). *North East Bay Independent & Gazette*.

Madamba, J. (1982). Changes in AB 757, Chapter 1136, Statutes of 1981. Sacramento: Subcommittee on Educational Reform.

March, J.G. (1981). Decisions in Organizations and Theories of Choice. In A. Van de Ven and W. Joyce, eds., *Perspectives on Organizational Design and Performance*. New York: Wiley.

Marcoulides, G. A., & Bruno, J. (1986). Analysis of Policy Issues in Teacher Certification. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 13(4), 68-81.

Mastain, R. K. (1987). Letter to Honorable Gary K. Hart. Sacramento: Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

Meyer, J.W., & B. Rowan. (1977). Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83: 340-363.

Office of Senator Gary Hart. (1981). Assemblyman Hart Introduces Teacher Examination Legislation. Sacramento.

Office of Program Evaluation and Research. (1983). *California Basic Educational Skills Test: A Documentation of the Implementation of AB 757: Teacher Proficiency Law*. Sacramento: California State Department of Education.

Our Readers Grade the CBEST Test. (1996, September 23). *The San Francisco Chronicle*, p. A21.

Powell, W. W. (1991). Expanding the Scope of Institutional Analysis. . In W. W. Powell & P. J. DiMaggio (Eds.), *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (pp. 183-203). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Pressman, J.L., & A.B. Wildavsky. (1973). *Implementation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Required Exams for Teacher are in Order. (1981, March 28). *Valley Register*.

Rudy, R., & Stein, S. (1981, September 15). Legislators pass bill requiring teacher proficiency test. *Peninsula Times Tribune*.

Sandefur, J. T. (1987). Historical Perspective: How Did Teacher Testing Evolve? Are New Trends Emerging? In L. M. Rudner (Ed.), *What's Happening in Teacher Testing: An Analysis of State Teacher Testing* (pp. 11-14). Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Scott, W. R. (1992). *Organizations: Rational, Natural and Open Systems. Third Edition*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Seeley, D. S. (1979). Reducing the Confrontation Over Teacher Accountability. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 64(4), 248-251.

Selected 1981 California Legislation. (1981) *Pacific Law Journal*, 13, 685-688.

Selznick, P. (1957). *Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Selznick, P. (1949). *TVA and the Grass Roots*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Selznick, P. (1948). "Foundations of the Theory of Organization," *American Sociological Review*, 24, 783-91.

Senate Committee on Education. (1981). *Staff Analysis of AB 757*. Sacramento.

Shiels, M. (1975, December 8). Why Johnny Can't Write. *Newsweek*, 58.

Smith, G. P. (1987). The Impact of Teacher Competency Tests on Teacher Education: Ethical and Legal Issues in Selecting and Certifying Teachers. In M. Haberman & J. M. Backus (Eds.), *Advances in Teacher Education* (Vol. 3, pp. 218-249). Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishers Corporation.

Subcommittee on Educational Reform. (1981). *Fact Sheet on AB 757*. Sacramento: California Assembly Education Committee.

Travers, E. F. (1980). The Case for Teacher Education at Selective Liberal Arts Colleges. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 62(2), 127-130.

Tyack, D., & L. Cuban. (1995). *Tinkering Toward Utopia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Watkins, R. W. (1985). *Testing Teacher Applicants with the California Basic Educational Skills Test*. Paper presented at the AERA Annual Meeting, Chicago, Illinois, March 31, 1985.

Wheeler, P., & Elias, P. (1983). *California Basic Educational Skills Test: Field Test and Validity Study Report*. Berkeley, California: Educational Testing Service.

Why can't some teachers spell? (1981, March 6). *Sacramento Union*, p. A10.

Williams, D. A. (1981, April 27). Teachers are in Trouble. *Newsweek*, 78-84.

Appendix 1
Sample Questions from the California Basic Educational Skills Test*

Reading Section

After touring the plains toward the close of the cowboy era, journalist Richard Harding Davis observed, "The inhabited part of a ranch, the part of it on which the owners live, bears about the same proportion to the rest of the ranch as a lighthouse does to the ocean around it." Based on Richard Harding Davis' observation, which of the following can be inferred about a ranch toward the close of the cowboy era?

- A. Most of a ranch was uninhabited by its owners.
- B. The size of a ranch rivaled the size of an ocean.
- C. Inhabitants of a ranch typically lived in privacy and seclusion.
- D. The working area around a ranch was uninhabitable by humans.
- E. The inhabitants of a ranch, like those of a lighthouse, should be viewed as caretakers.

All fruit juices contain the sugar fructose, and there is no doubt that some kinds of sugar are harmful. Which of the following can be correctly inferred from the statement above?

- A. All fruit juices are harmful.
- B. Some, but not all, fruit juices are harmful.
- C. Grapefruit juice does not contain any sugar.
- D. Fruit juices are more harmful than vegetable juices.
- E. Orange juice contains at least one kind of sugar.

(The correct reading answers are A and E)

Mathematics Section

Amy drinks $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups of milk three times a day. At this rate, how many cups of milk will she drink in one week?

- A. $4\frac{1}{2}$
- B. $7\frac{1}{2}$
- C. $10\frac{1}{2}$
- D. $21\frac{1}{2}$
- E. $31\frac{1}{2}$

Alicia's gross weekly salary is \$412.50. If 2 percent of this salary is deducted for state taxes and 8 percent is deducted for benefits, which of the following is the closest estimate, in dollars, of these deductions?

- A. $(0.02)(400) + (0.08)(400)$
- B. $(0.02)(420) + (0.08)(420)$
- C. $(0.10)(410)$
- D. $(0.16)(410)$
- E. $(0.16)(420)$

(The correct math answers are E and C)

Writing Section

Ernest Hemingway once commented, "As you get older, it is harder to have heroes, but it is sort of necessary." To what extent do you agree or disagree with his observation? Support your answer with specific examples.

* Reprinted from (Hill, 1996, p.41)

Appendix 2

Description of a “Borderline” Teacher Candidate Used in Establishing CBEST Passing Standards*

Dale (a non-sexist referent)

- < Dale was an average high school student that [sic] wanted to go into education to work with children.
- < In taking the SAT for entrance into college, Dale scored 360 on the verbal section ($X = 426$) and 380 on the quantitative section ($X = 467$) (these scores are well below the average SAT performance).
- < Throughout the undergraduate program, Dale received B's and C's and an occasional A in the liberal arts teacher education curriculum.
- < While student teaching in the sixth grade, the supervising teacher noted in her evaluation, that Dale's lesson plans and progress notes were poorly organized and contained numerous grammatical errors.
- < The supervising teacher also noted that Dale reads aloud rather poorly.
- < Dale can, of course, read the daily newspaper but only comprehends and retains superficial knowledge.
- < In student teaching, Dale is personable and truly enjoys working with children.
- < Dale can give clear directions for assignments, but often times doesn't answer questions from students, instead referring them to the librarian or science teacher, as appropriate.
- < The supervising teacher found that her lesson plans have not been followed by Dale to the letter and that mistakes were made in the grade books.
- < The principal and department head have also done several evaluations of Dale's work.
- < The department head finds that Dale doesn't seem to read well enough to understand the curriculum guides of the district. Furthermore, in grading students [sic] essays, Dale fails to detect grammatical errors in student's [sic] papers.
- < Notes home to parents occasionally have spelling mistakes and exhibit a rather haphazard organization of the information.

* Reprinted from Wheeler & Elias, 1983, Appendix E

Appendix 3

Selected Results from the California Basic Educational Skills Test*

FIGURE 4.4 CBEST Passing Rates by Credential Sought, 1989-90

Credential Sought	Number Tested	Percent Passing	% Change from 1988-89
Multiple subject	5,673	71%	+2%
Multiple subject, with bilingual	684	45%	+3%
Single subject	3,820	76%	no change
Single subject, with bilingual	298	52%	-2%
Emergency teaching	3,721	80%	+2%
Administrative services	740	79%	+1%
Pupil personnel services	795	75%	no change

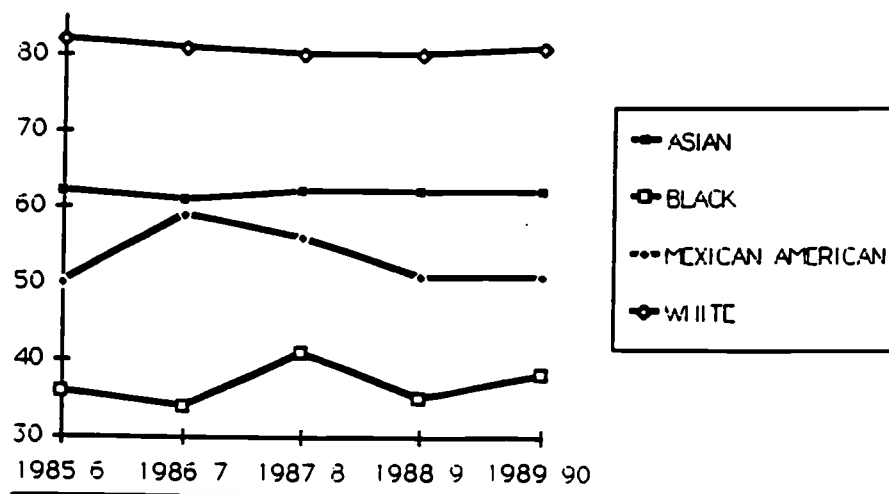
SOURCE: California Commission on Teacher Credentialing

FIGURE 4.5 CBEST Passing Rates by Ethnicity, 1989-90

Ethnic Background	Number Tested	% of Total Taking Test	Percent Passing	% Change from 1988-89
Asian	1,336	3.4%	67%	no change
Black	2,119	5.4%	38%	+3%
Mexican American	2,451	6.1%	51%	no change
Other Hispanic	1,072	2.7%	48%	-2%
White	32,148	79.1%	81%	+1%
Other groups	1,197	3.3%	63%	+2%

SOURCE: California Commission on Teacher Credentialing

FIGURE 4.6 CBEST Passing Rates by Ethnicity



SOURCE: California Commission on Teacher Credentialing

* Reprinted from (Guthrie et al., 1991, pp.40-1)



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

TM 028436
ERIC

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: <i>Political Symbolism, Organizational Entrenchment and The Short History of The California Basic Educational Skills Test</i>	
Author(s): <i>Matthew Kelemen and William S. Koski</i>	
Corporate Source:	Publication Date: <i>April 1998</i>

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents
<div>PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY <i>Sample</i> TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)</div> <p>1</p>	<div>PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY <i>Sample</i> TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)</div> <p>2A</p>	<div>PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY <i>Sample</i> TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)</div> <p>2B</p>
Level 1 ↓ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Level 2A ↓ <input type="checkbox"/>	Level 2B ↓ <input type="checkbox"/>

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy.

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign
here, →
please

Signature: <i>W. S. Koski</i>	Printed Name/Position/Title: <i>William S. Koski</i>	
Organization/Address: <i>Stanford University, School of Educ. Stanford, CA 94305</i>	Telephone:	FAX:
	E-Mail Address:	Date: <i>4/13/98</i>



Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation

University of Maryland
1129 Shriver Laboratory
College Park, MD 20742-5701

Tel: (800) 464-3742

(301) 405-7449

FAX: (301) 405-8134

ericae@ericae.net

<http://ericae.net>

March 20, 1998

Dear AERA Presenter,

Congratulations on being a presenter at AERA¹. The ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation invites you to contribute to the ERIC database by providing us with a printed copy of your presentation.

Abstracts of papers accepted by ERIC appear in *Resources in Education (RIE)* and are announced to over 5,000 organizations. The inclusion of your work makes it readily available to other researchers, provides a permanent archive, and enhances the quality of *RIE*. Abstracts of your contribution will be accessible through the printed and electronic versions of *RIE*. The paper will be available through the microfiche collections that are housed at libraries around the world and through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service.

We are gathering all the papers from the AERA Conference. We will route your paper to the appropriate clearinghouse. You will be notified if your paper meets ERIC's criteria for inclusion in *RIE*: contribution to education, timeliness, relevance, methodology, effectiveness of presentation, and reproduction quality. You can track our processing of your paper at <http://ericae.net>.

Please sign the Reproduction Release Form on the back of this letter and include it with two copies of your paper. The Release Form gives ERIC permission to make and distribute copies of your paper. It does not preclude you from publishing your work. You can drop off the copies of your paper and Reproduction Release Form at the ERIC booth (424) or mail to our attention at the address below. Please feel free to copy the form for future or additional submissions.

Mail to: AERA 1998/ERIC Acquisitions
University of Maryland
1129 Shriver Laboratory
College Park, MD 20742

This year ERIC/AE is making a **Searchable Conference Program** available on the AERA web page (<http://aera.net>). Check it out!

Sincerely,

Lawrence M. Rudner, Ph.D.
Director, ERIC/AE

¹If you are an AERA chair or discussant, please save this form for future use.



The Catholic University of America